



Urban  
Institute



National Institute  
Of Corrections

## The Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) Initiative

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### Introduction

Roughly nine million individuals cycle through the nations' jails each year, yet relatively little attention has been given to the unique challenges and opportunities surrounding reentry from local jails. In response, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) partnered with the Urban Institute (UI) to launch the *Transition from Jail to Community* initiative (TJC) in 2007. The TJC initiative is designed to advance coordinated and collaborative relationships between jails and local communities to address reentry, leading to enhanced public safety, reduced recidivism, and improved individual reintegration outcomes. These objectives are to be achieved through the development, implementation and evaluation of an innovative and effective jail-to-community transition model.

The first phase of the initiative was dedicated to the design, and development of an adaptable and effective model for jail transition that can be implemented in a wide variety of settings (rural, suburban and urban) with diverse jail populations. During *Phase II* of the initiative, implementation of the TJC model began in two jurisdictions, Douglas County, KS and Denver, CO in the fall of 2008. In *Phase III*, implementation will continue in the initial two TJC sites, while four additional jurisdictions are selected in the summer of 2009. Each site employs the TJC model as a guide to devise a TJC approach tailored to local circumstances, resources and priorities.

All six TJC sites will receive tailored technical assistance to implement the model. The Urban Institute will conduct evaluations in all six sites to assess how the TJC model was implemented and the extent to which it led to anticipated outcomes at both the system and individual level. The TJC project team is also developing a web-based TJC Implementation Toolkit for use by practitioners and policymakers interested in replicating the TJC approach.

### Jail Transition: Challenges and Opportunities

City and county jails touch millions of lives each year. Most of the estimated nine million individuals who cycle through local jails return to the surrounding community within just a few weeks. The needs of these individuals are formidable: the prevalence of substance abuse, mental illness, unemployment, and homelessness is high among the jail population. At the same time, the capacity for treatment and services in most jails is limited at best. These facts underscore the need for an innovative, collaborative, data-driven approach to

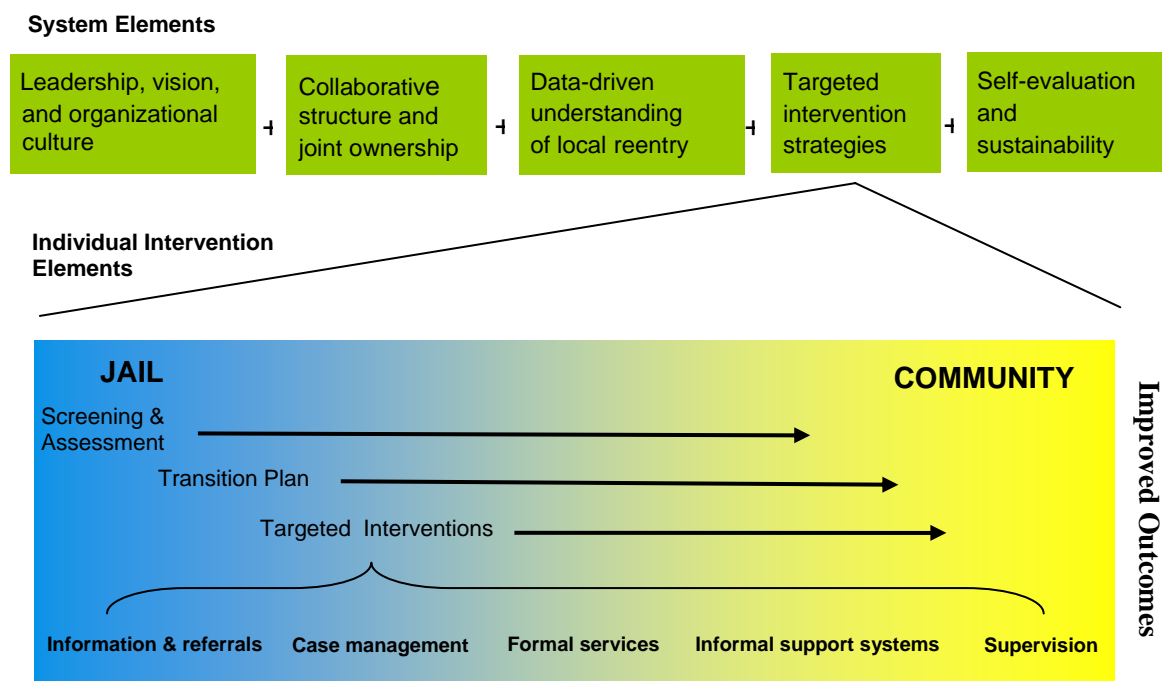
jail transition. The TJC initiative is a call to change rooted in the reality that jails and communities must jointly own and address the issue of local reentry.

TJC is not a discrete program, but rather a new way of doing business. To that end, the TJC model provides a road map for collaboration and systems change and charts a clear course for jail and community partners by identifying the essential elements of an effective jail transition strategy. Given the diversity of jail systems and community settings, jurisdictions will tailor implementation of the model’s essential elements to reflect and respond to local needs and capacities. Although all elements of the model must be present in each TJC site’s jail transition strategy, sites are expected and will be encouraged to pursue approaches that take into account local needs and assets.

## The TJC Model

The TJC model incorporates lessons learned from prior criminal justice system reform efforts, particularly NIC’s Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) initiative, as well as findings from the considerable body of prisoner reentry research and the growing literature on evidence-based practices. The model’s development was informed by the knowledge and expertise of a diverse group of advisors convened by the TJC project team, including jail administrators, sheriffs, local law enforcement, social service providers, community and victims advocates, formerly incarcerated individuals, corrections policy experts, and researchers.

The figure below illustrates the TJC approach to effective jail transition and identifies the key components of the TJC model at both the **system level** and the **intervention level**. Systems change must be coupled with concrete intervention efforts. The sections that follow discuss the system and intervention elements of the model in detail.



## **System-Level Elements**

The TJC model represents an integrated, system-wide approach to delivering support and services to people released from jail. It involves policy and organizational change and the engagement of jail and community leaders in a collaborative effort.

### **Leadership, Vision and Organizational Culture**

The development of an effective jail transition strategy requires the active involvement of key decision-makers to set expectations, to identify important issues, to articulate a clear vision of success, and to engage staff and other stakeholders in the effort. These key stakeholders will lead local efforts to build a common vision for systems reform; develop infrastructure for inter-agency and community collaboration, coordination, and information sharing; align missions and organizational cultures of partner agencies to support transition goals; and clarify and define roles and responsibilities under the local initiative. In addition, champions or “change agents” from all levels at key agencies will be critical to moving the initiative forward.

### **Collaborative Structure and Joint Ownership**

Transition from jail to the community is neither the sole responsibility of the jail system nor of the community. Effective transition strategies rely on collaboration and information-sharing among jail and community-based partners and joint ownership of the problem and the solution. Given that many of the people who exit jails are already involved with multiple social service and criminal justice agencies, a collaborative approach is essential to tackling jail transition.

Successful implementation of the TJC model requires formal buy-in from multiple individuals and agencies in a community, from criminal justice and local government stakeholders to community members and organizations. Key stakeholders include:

- jail administrators and/or sheriffs,
- police departments,
- community supervision and pretrial services agencies,
- the courts, prosecutors and public defenders,
- county executives and local legislators,
- treatment and service providers,
- health and mental health agencies,
- housing, economic development, and workforce development agencies,
- local businesses and corporate entities,
- victim advocates,
- members of the affected population and their families, and
- community residents.

Building and maintaining the collaborative partnerships necessary to plan and carry out a TJC initiative requires many different individuals and organizations to play different roles and assume different responsibilities. Sites are required to devise a collaborative structure that includes both an executive-level entity to provide strategic direction and oversight, and a implementation-level entity to craft and execute specific elements of the local TJC initiative. This may involve forming a local reentry council or building on existing

criminal justice councils. In rural areas, reentry councils may be regional and include representatives from surrounding communities and jurisdictions. In addition to shared goals and principles, joint ownership also involves identifying shared outcomes of interest and common performance measures to assess progress, inform adjustments to the strategy, and hold the local initiative accountable to its goals.

### **Data-driven Understanding of Local Reentry**

In the development of a jail transition strategy, decision-making and policy formation must be informed by local data. An understanding of local barriers and assets is especially relevant in the area of jail transition, in that most people exiting jail return to a relatively small number of nearby communities where resources are often scarce and must be efficiently targeted. To better understand their local context, TJC sites will review jail management information systems and program records maintained by community agencies to identify the characteristics and needs of the jail population as well as the range of available resources. This baseline information is critical to the accurate assessment of key issues and the development of an appropriate set of integrated responses.

A clear understanding of the local reentry landscape is necessary to establish policies and programs that reflect local realities – including political and legal constraints as well as opportunities for collaboration and resource and capacity development. Accordingly, jurisdictions are expected to: (1) assess the characteristics of the jail population, local crime problems, and existing laws and policies that govern various aspects of jail transition; (2) identify the specific geographic areas to which the jail population returns upon release; (3) identify those subsets of the jail population likely to consume disproportionate criminal justice and programmatic resources; (4) identify resources that can be leveraged to address key issues, and the appropriate action steps to remove potential obstacles; and (5) track service referrals, engagement and use, and share that information with partner agencies on a regular basis.

### **Targeted Intervention Strategies**

Targeted intervention strategies form the core of the TJC model at the individual level, and comprise the basic building blocks for effective jail transition. The strategy to improve transition at the individual level involves introducing specific interventions at critical points along the jail-to-community continuum. The underlying premise is that interventions at these key points can improve reintegration and reduce reoffending, thereby increasing public safety. Critical to this approach are the principles that: (1) interventions begin in jail with the booking process and continue, as needed, throughout the incarceration and in the community upon release; and (2) interventions are tailored to the specific needs, risks, and strengths of each individual.

The model's main intervention-level elements are screening and assessment, transition planning, and interventions that range from information packets to structured treatment and programming. A growing body of empirically-based evidence about what works in reentry suggests that assessment, intervention and aftercare are key components for any strategy aimed at reducing offender recidivism. Implementation of evidence-based practices such as motivational interviewing or treatment programs that use cognitive behavioral therapy

may further reduce recidivism and promote reintegration. The TJC initiative encourages jurisdictions to incorporate these and other evidence-based practices into the design of their intervention strategies. Further discussion of intervention-level elements is presented later in this document.

### **Self-Evaluation and Sustainability**

The final system-level building blocks needed to ensure success are ongoing self-evaluation and sustainability planning. Self-evaluation refers to the ability and commitment of local stakeholders to monitor progress and make needed modifications throughout the process to ensure that both intermediate and long-term goals are met. Baseline data collected on the jail transition population and available resources should continue to be collected in support of ongoing self-evaluation. Routine assessments of the initiative's efforts should include data on key outcomes that are of interest to partners and potential funders to show progress in achieving desired improvements. Jurisdictions are encouraged to establish mechanisms—such as forums, routine reports from partner agencies, or client satisfaction surveys—to obtain early and frequent feedback from partners and constituents regarding key aspects of the initiative. TJC sites will also receive regular and timely feedback on implementation as part of the initiative's evaluation effort, and will be encouraged to use this information to modify and strengthen their application of the TJC model.

The ultimate goal of the TJC initiative is to build jail to community transition efforts that last. Sustainability depends on both formal and informal mechanisms employed by the local initiative to ensure the longevity and legacy of their efforts. Formal information-sharing and resource-sharing agreements that delineate how agencies and organizations work together over time are examples of mechanisms that promote sustainability. The continued involvement of local reentry or criminal justice councils in jail transition can also facilitate the sustainability of efforts over time.

### **Intervention-Level Elements**

Every TJC jurisdiction's intervention strategy will consist of, at a minimum, screening and assessment, transition planning, and specific targeted interventions. Implemented together, these core elements will ensure that each individual will have an opportunity to receive the appropriate mix of interventions for his or her unique needs both within jail and in the community after release.

#### **Screening and Assessment**

Routine screening and assessment of individual's risks, needs, and capacities is an essential component of an effective jail transition intervention strategy. TJC implementation requires institution of a universal brief screen during the booking process should capture medical, mental health, and substance abuse issues, and include a checklist to identify less immediate needs such as employment and housing history. Screening information will inform decisions about classification and placement in the jail, and indicate whether a fuller assessment is warranted. A more detailed assessment may be necessary to measure the severity of substance abuse or mental health issues identified during the initial screening and to construct an individual transition plan. Ongoing

assessment will inform the construction of an individual's initial jail-to-community transition plan and subsequent revisions to that plan.

The TJC sites will receive technical assistance and guidance in selecting appropriate screening tools and assessment instruments that satisfy both the informational requirements of the model and local concerns (e.g., inexpensive, easy to administer, yield information useful to a variety of partners). Some sites may already have routine screening and assessment tools in place; in such instances, TJC will help the sites evaluate the adequacy of these tools in meeting local needs.

### **Transition Plan**

A transition plan is essential in preparing individuals for release and enhancing long term reintegration, particularly for those who are assessed as moderate- or high-risk/need. The plan specifies the types of interventions an individual needs, when and where interventions should occur and who will deliver them, and the activities for which the individual needs to take responsibility. In the jail setting, a transition plan can be as simple as receiving resource packets before release or as comprehensive as working with a case manager and community based providers weeks or months before release and upon return to the community.

For individuals who warrant more comprehensive transition plans, these plans should be informed by an individual's initial screening and assessment and regularly reviewed and updated as necessary in jail and after release. Transition plans will typically specify pre-release interventions to be delivered either by jail staff or community-based providers conducting jail "in-reach". Plans will also include discharge interventions to address the "moment of release"—those critical first hours and days after release from jail—and to facilitate the provision of needed services in the community. The plans may target issues such as housing, employment, family reunification, educational needs, substance abuse treatment, and health and mental health services. In many cases, a discharge plan may be the primary intervention for individuals released within hours or a few days of entering jail.

Implicit in this approach is the understanding that "one size" does not fit all and that plans should be tailored for each individual. Some individuals, for example, will need extensive services and support including intensive case management to effectively transition to the community while others may only minimal assistance, if any.

### **Targeted Interventions**

The scope of a jurisdiction's targeted interventions may range from formal treatment to, more commonly, access to community-based providers, volunteers, or family members who conduct "in-reach" into the jail. Some interventions will occur in jail while others will take place in the community after release. Many interventions will begin in jail and continue with a community-based provider after the individual's release from jail, facilitating greater continuity for service delivery leading to improved outcomes.

Pre-release interventions, delivered either by jail staff or community-based providers, may include: provision of informational resources such as resource packets, information bins in the facility, or a designated Resource Officer; brief training programs that prepare individuals for reentry; services such as drug and alcohol treatment, educational programs, and job training; access to community-based and informal social supports such as family, mentors and members of the faith community; and case management to facilitate continuity of care (wherein individual clients retain a single case manager/transition planner before and after release).

Discharge interventions are designed to aid the individual's transition from jail to the community and to sustain gains made through pre-release interventions. Examples of discharge interventions include: resource packets; referrals to community agencies; scheduled appointments in the community; a temporary supply of medication; identification documents; updated transition plans; transportation to a service provider, home, or probation office; and contact information for key individuals who will facilitate the individual's service plan in the community.

Work done while in jail to begin treatment, develop relationships with service providers, and connect individuals to service appointments in the community will have little impact after release without follow-up in the community. Accordingly, it is important that community-based organizations and support networks provide continuity of care—or in many cases, initiate care—through services, training, treatment, and case management when an individual is released. Examples of community-based interventions include service provision in areas such as job readiness training, substance abuse treatment and mental health counseling; post-release case management; access to reentry information through outreach or a toll-free hotline; engaging informal social supports; and post-release supervision, as applicable.

## **Triage Planning**

Given the diversity of the jail population, unpredictable lengths of stay, limited resources, and principles of evidence-based practice, it is not feasible or desirable to provide the same level of intervention to everyone who enters the jail. Instead, jurisdictions will need to prioritize their resources and determine "who gets what." Triage planning helps classify individuals and identify the appropriate mix of targeted interventions for each individual based on information about risks, needs, and strengths obtained during initial screening and assessment, as well as anticipated length of stay. The TJC project team has developed a triage tool to help local jurisdictions prioritize goals, identify target populations, and allocate limited resources to their intervention strategies.

## **Next Steps**

Urban Institute and NIC will release an application to select four additional TJC pilot sites on May 1, 2009. A cross-site kick-off meeting, baseline data collection and analyses, and the development of site-specific jail transition plans will follow shortly thereafter. The initial two TJC sites will continue to implement their site-specific jail transition plans through fall 2011. All six TJC sites will receive two years of training and technical assistance on the design and implementation of a local jail transition strategy although no

funds will be transferred to the local jail or community. Ongoing technical assistance and evaluation activities will assess progress and provide continuous feedback to communities as they implement the TJC model and construct and refine jail-to-community transition strategies.

The web-based TJC Implementation Toolkit is scheduled for release in September of 2009. The team will also periodically issue research briefs reporting on the progress and outcomes of their evaluation efforts.

**For more information and updates on TJC, visit [www.jailtransition.com](http://www.jailtransition.com) or contact:**

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